

What part should the EU play in the improvement of the economical and political situation of the Republic of Moldova?

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The present situation of the Republic of Moldova is bad both at home and on an international level, and this situation is not really changing, and if, it is then very slowly. The Republic of Moldova is a country with a small economy, extremely dependent on the import of energy and on foreign sales markets, and where the general situation is strongly influenced by the Transnistrian conflict, the solving of which depends ultimately on external factors.

Among these factors the European Union plays an increasing importance, whether it wants to or not. Does the European Union faces some problems in its relationships with the Republic of Moldova, in order to deep the relationships ? Are there any ? It seems that there aren't, because as soon as the chance of becoming EU neighbor appeared, our country got on the EU agenda, which has finally taken a position regarding the EU – Moldova relationships.

Thus, the European Commission adopted several documents – the communications “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours”, “Paving the way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument”, “European Neighbourhood Policy. Startegy Paper”, “European Neighbourhood Policy. Country Report. Moldova”, and the Action Plan Moldova – EU which is now being developed. What is true though is that firstly the Action Plan appeared on paper, and then the Strategy and the Country Report came out. Although the European Commission's Communication on March 11, 2003 and all the program documents issued later on, mentioned particularly the differentiated approach of the EU to the relationships with its neighbors, in its 33 pages of the European Neighbourhood Policy the word “Moldova” is mentioned 10 times, and only one time a whole line is dedicated exclusively to Moldova.

The EU Enlargement Architect, the European Commissioner Mr. Gunter Verheugen, who a year ago qualified Moldova as a country with a semi-dictatorial regime, visits Chisinau in December 2003 mentioning that Moldova has to follow the path traced by the New Neighbourhood Policy and to totally turn against the participation in the Stabilization and Association Process. In February Mr. Verheugen declared that Moldova by making a sufficient effort could overtake some of the Balkan countries. Not much later Mr. Verheugen declares that no ex-soviet republic will become an EU member in the following 20 years.

This is probably, from our point of view, one of **the most important problem of the EU** – if within the EU there is no clear opinion on the relationships with Moldova, and they declare different things at different times, or the opinion exists, and they are doing the same thing as the Moldovan authorities – they have several speeches, at least two: one for the outsiders (The Republic of Moldova can overtake some countries ...) and another for the EU citizens (in the near future no ex-soviet republic will join the EU...)

It is true that Moldovans are permanently criticized for several messages (one for Brussels, another one for Moscow, etc.). We are always warned that if we have serious intentions to integrate into EU, we will have to analyze, at a certain moment, how compatible is the idea of joining the EU and the WTO membership with the CIS membership. But what is the difference between CIS and the BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation) Organization, or the Central European Initiative ? All three structures have executive secretariats, and other kinds of institutions, the member states cooperate not only in the economical sector but also on security issues (the struggle against organized crime, for example). All those three structures have limits and cooperation areas determined by the

member states, there aren't any customs unions or a common market. Why don't they reproach Greece, an EU member, that it is at the same time member of the Organization of BSEC, along with Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and other CIS states ? Why the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary etc. were not required, when becoming an EU member, to leave the Central European Initiative, which among these states, the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, are members of ? Another example is the creation of the free trade area by the CIS countries: if the intention is to create an FTA that will include the whole CIS area, then it is a bad idea, and if the FTA will cover only the GUUAM states, then the West and especially the US welcomes the idea.

Probably this is a matter of perception, which is a wrong one. The difference between Moldova, on one side, and Greece, Austria, Italy, etc. on the other side, is that Moldova, besides the BSEC Organization is also a member of CIS and GUUAM. But Moldova does not promote a common foreign policy together with Russia or other CIS countries, does not belong to the Common Economic Space, and is a member of the SECI, of the WTO, the Council of Europe and of many other structures of European regional and sub-regional cooperation.

Despite all this, the European Neighbourhood Policy does not take into account all individual aspects that describe Moldova (but also all the other neighbors). This is **another problem that EU faces**, which waits to be solved.

Coming back to the interest towards the Republic of Moldova, we will mention that starting with the fall 2003, many conferences have been organized, where the situation of the Republic of Moldova was discussed, and what is extremely important is that the majority of them took place not in Chisinau, but in Germany, Great Britain, in Brussels, Bucharest, etc. A number of publications appeared in Chisinau, but especially abroad – Great Britain, Germany, France, USA, Poland, etc. – that were dedicated to the relationship between Moldova and EU, almost all of them including recommendations not only for Moldova, but also for the European Union [1 - 7]. In the following we will try to summarize the conclusions drawn up at different conferences and in publications. After analyzing all of them, we come up with the following ideas.

The EU Expansion, in spite of all declarations, creates new division lines. New candidates for EU membership, besides those named 5 years ago, are not accepted. The visa policy becomes more and more harsh, and the slow and unwilling manner of dealing with these problems comes in strong contrast with all other EU policies. They say that the ENP is an anchor for Stabilization and Development, but this anchor is thrown in the EU waters for the new member states (some of which still need this anchor), but for Moldova this anchor is again thrown in the Nistru River.

The EU policies are still dominated by the so-called regional approach, despite the declarations about differentiation, and there isn't a clear idea with respect to whether EU truly has the intention to strengthen its relationships with Moldova and to contribute effectively to the solving of the existing problems.

The European Commission, being under the pressure of the surrounding events, has, on one side, little time available to develop the program documents. On the other side, the mandate of the present Commission expires at the end of this year, and probably this fact has a negative impact on the quality of the documents.

Thus, as we mentioned before, first appeared the Action Plan, and only after it the Strategy and Country Report followed, although everything should have been the other way around. The Action Plan is very much based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, but neither the Republic of Moldova, nor the European Commission did a detailed and honest evaluation of the implementation and the efficiency of the PCA, the TACIS Program etc.

The Strategy doesn't only exclude the differentiated approach of the countries, but it is also very vague, particularly, regarding the essence of the future European Neighbourhood Agreements.

The confuse and contradictory signals that come sometimes from Brussels to Chisinau lose any sign of importance when accompanied by the critics brought before EU by the Chisinau analysts with respect to the double standards used by EU. Also, the lack of an EU Delegation in Chisinau has a negative influence, as its existence would mean a much more efficient dialog then the one kept through the Delegation from Kiev.

The lack of a clear perspective on a future membership is more difficult to accept in the environment of a never-ending dispute on the fact whether the European perspective is a pre-condition for reforms or the other way around, and this is true in the situation when the answer already exists for a long time for the others, but not for Moldova. Many experts say that in a weak state and a poor country it is very difficult to convince the society to go through reforms (often painful) without letting it know what the final goal is.

Another problem the EU faces and that has bad consequences for Moldova is that the relationship with Moldova promoted by the EU takes into account Russia's interests. Half a century ago the people that populated the present territory of Moldova suffered because of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and now, some analysts say, the situation is repeating: EU and USA concluded a kind of "non-aggression agreement" with Russia that makes Moldova suffer again, as it is not capable of solving the Transnistrian conflict by itself. The Republic of Moldova, not having allies in solving the conflicts, is entirely at Russia's disposal (informally – at Transnistria's disposal, but this fact is understood by all involved in the discussions, although nobody admits it). If the conflict is not solved, it can bring the process of a future integration of Moldova into the EU to its end, especially as Moldova does not have anybody to support it even in this issue. It is true that the EU declared that it will get involved in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, but so far it practically refuses any instrument for this involvement, which diminishes the intention to declaration.

However, despite the deficiencies and the problems that the EU faces, and despite its very prudent position, more and more experts and politicians believe that for the Republic of Moldova, the most important factor, that concerns both the economical development and the solving of the Transnistrian conflict, is the closeness to the EU.

But for this policy to be a success the EU must have the possibility to influence its relationship with the Republic of Moldova, and this is a difficult thing to achieve within the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. One solution would be for the member states of the EU, and not the European Commission, to be more active in promoting the relationships with the Republic of Moldova (there are already good examples in this respect: Russia signed agreements with France and Italy concerning the liberalization of the visa system).

Generally, the EU tries to promote the policy of conditionality offering some concessions in exchange for the promotion of democratic reforms. The recent experience shows that this policy is not very efficient, and this is probably because the offer of EU is not consistent. In order to enhance the overall political and economic situation in the Republic of Moldova, and to obtain more results regarding the security and stability matters at its future border with the Republic of Moldova, the EU has to use a number of tools, among which the most important would be the following:

1. Membership perspective. This is the main tool that catalyzed the reforms in the states that have recently become EU members.

For the Republic of Moldova, the process can follow two steps. The first step would be Moldova to be promised become an association member by signing a respective Agreement

in 2007. Depending on the results of the Action Plan implementation, Moldova could either remain with the status of neighbor or become an associate member of the EU. The fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria, being the second step, should end with Moldova becoming an EU member.

2. *The liberalization of the visa policy.* The EU could issue multiple Schengen visas for a longer term for different categories of people. For example, the official people and delegations (members of the government and of the parliament), business people, scientific researchers should benefit from multiple Schengen visas on a 3-5 year term, the students, pupils, and university lecturers – on a 1-2 year term etc.

Euro-consulates should become a reality.

The liberalization of the visa system would contribute to the intensification of the people-to-people contacts, as the Action Plan stipulates, thus diminishing very much the corruption in this area.

3. *The management of the migration process,* by legalizing the illegal immigrants that did not break the law in any other way, and establishing certain shares, initially for the seasonal workers, and later for other categories of workers.

4. *The asymmetrical and real opening of an EU market* for the producers from the Republic of Moldova. It is extremely important for this market to also include the products from Transnistria, thus the business people from this region would become interested to register as economical agents of the Republic of Moldova.

5. *The support of the civil society and the independent press* in the Republic of Moldova; The supervision of elections by the EU, not only by the OSCE.

6. *The opening of the European Union Delegation in Chisinau,* the nomination of a special envoy for the Transnistrian conflict settlement.

7. *The real involvement of the EU in solving the Transnistrian conflict.* Here the EU could use different methods. For example, the member states could participate in actions within a multi-national military force that have as a goal the disarming of the paramilitary units in Transnistria and then the maintenance of peace in the region. The EU could use as a method of positive discrimination the liberalization of the visa system for the citizens on the right side of the Nistru River, and the opening of the market for the Moldovan economical agents that have official relationships with the state budget. At the same time the EU could use repressive means against Transnistrian leaders (refusals on issuing visas, blocking the European bank accounts etc.).

But for this to happen the EU has to define its official policy regarding the solving of the Transnistrian conflict, and to promote this policy consistently, orienting itself not only towards Russia's interests but also towards the regional security and stability.

The collaboration with Russia, Ukraine, the US and the OSCE should be promoted constantly, not from case to case. An ad-hoc monitoring group, which would have as members the EU and Moldovan representatives, would be a real help in this matter.

The experience of the previous years shows that EU can strongly influence the situation of the outside countries, and none of the goals described above are impossible to reach, but the most important condition for the EU to really influence the situation in Moldova is to take the political decision and to open the membership perspective for the Republic of Moldova. If the door that is not closed it simply means that it is open, and this thing should be officially acknowledged.

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